

**James Madison to Edmund Pendleton, October 30, 1781. With postscript from Joseph Jones.
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ed. Gaillard Hunt. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons,
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TO EDMUND PENDLETON.¹

1 From the Madison Papers (1840.)

Philadelphia, October 30, 1781.

Dear Sir, —I return you my fervent congratulations on the glorious success of the combined arms at York and Gloucester. We have had from the Commander-in-Chief an official report of the fact, with a copy of the capitulation, and a general intimation that the number of prisoners, excluding seamen, &c., would exceed five thousand; but no detail of our gains. If these severe doses of ill fortune do not cool the phrenzy and relax the pride of Britain, it would seem as if Heaven had in reality abandoned her to her folly and her fate. This campaign was grounded on the most intense exertion of her pecuniary resources. Upwards of twenty millions were voted by the Parliament. The King acknowledged that it was all he asked, and all that was necessary. A fair trial has been made of her strength; and what is the result? They have lost another army, another colony, another island, and another fleet of her trade; their possessions in the East Indies, which were so rich a source of their commerce and credit, have been severed from them, perhaps for ever; their naval armaments, the bulwarks of their safety, and the idols of their vanity, have in every contest felt the rising superiority of their enemies. In no points have they succeeded, except in the

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predatory conquest of Eustatia, of which they have lost the greatest part of every thing except the infamy, and in the relief of Gibraltar, which was merely a negative advantage. With what

hope or with what view can they try the fortune of another campaign? Unless they can draw succour from the compassion or jealousy of other powers, of which it does not yet appear that they have any well-founded expectation, it seems scarcely possible for them much longer to shut their ears against the voice of peace.

I am sorry to find that the practice of impressing is still kept up with you. It is partial and oppressive with respect to individuals, and I wish it may not eventually prove so with respect to the State. The zeal and liberality of those States which make undue advances, may not find an equal disposition to re-imburse them, in others which have had more caution, or less occasion for such exertions.

You are not mistaken in your apprehensions for our Western interests. An agrarian law is as much coveted by the little members of the Union, as ever it was by the indigent citizens of Rome. The conditions annexed by Virginia to her territorial cession have furnished a committee of Congress a handle for taking up questions of right, both with respect to the ceding States, and the great Land Companies, which they have not before ventured to touch. We have made every opposition and remonstrance to the conduct of the committee which the forms of proceedings will admit. When a report is made, we shall renew our efforts upon more eligible ground, but with little hope of arresting any aggression upon Virginia which depends solely on the inclination of Congress. Since the close of the Confederation, however, it has been understood, that seven votes are necessary to carry every question. This rule, in proportion to the thinness of Congress, opposes a difficulty to those who attack. It will therefore, I believe, be impossible for the enemies of Virginia to obtain any positive injury to her rights. My greatest anxiety at present is, lest the attempts for that purpose may exasperate the Assembly into measures which will furnish new hopes to the British Court to persevere in the war, and new baits for the credulity of the

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British nation. The good sense of the Assembly will, however, I flatter myself, temper every expression of their displeasure with due respect to this consideration. It would be particularly unhappy, if any symptoms of disunion among ourselves should blast the golden prospects which the events of the campaign have opened to us.